



Investing in water security  
for climate resilient growth and development  
**Policy Brief | No. 3**

## Ensuring Adaptation At All Levels

### Key messages:

- Vision and drive to make development more climate-resilient is vital at all levels of governance and within sectors operating at each level.
- Central government is a natural driver for change, using its leadership to help coordinate national climate-resilient development alongside poverty and disaster risk reduction strategies.
- Regional Economic Communities and River and Lake Basin Organisations have a crucial role in realising the vast potential of Africa's transboundary waters.
- Local communities are in the front line for the impact of climate change, and need support with local agendas and priorities.
- The onus of implementing climate-resilient development ultimately falls to non-state actors in civil society, water users and private businesses. Policy-makers must harness and motivate these key stakeholders.

Africa is one of the regions in the world most vulnerable to climate change. Climate resilient development cannot be achieved by simply addressing the risks at a project or programme level. Vision and drive to integrate climate change into development planning is vital at all levels of governance. The first step is to embed this vision in central government so that line ministries take up the challenge of climate change in their policy formulation, planning and programmes. Through their participation in River and Lake Basin Organisations (RLBOs) – both national and international – government can ensure that the vast potential benefits of transboundary waters are realised at the regional level. This will lead to a system where resilience is at the heart of economic development and investment planning from the beginning.

### Development planning and climate change

The prospect of climate change obliges central planners and implementing agencies to update and re-configure their investment portfolios by: (i) including more no/low-regret options which provide returns under any climate future; (ii) adapting climate change risky investments to reduce risk where feasible; and (iii) considering selected (climate change justified) investments as a hedge against the serious risks that would be caused by climate change.

Rather than seeing climate change and adaptation as a separate issue, with separate planning processes, development planning should itself be adapted to accommodate the challenges imposed by climate change. Much of the effort in adaptation to climate change in Africa

has set a separate agenda for adaptation activities and programmes, and in some cases separate budget lines. The temptation to set up separate processes should be resisted – climate resilience should be part of the mainstream of development.

### Government's central role in promoting resilience at all levels

Integrating climate resilience into development planning processes requires action across a range of planning levels and sectors. Central governments must direct and drive this process, but their actions have to be implemented by a hierarchy of actors and agencies, each with their own constraints and agendas. Figure 1 identifies key relationships across these levels. Many governments have delegated responsibilities



for water issues to lower levels of administration, thereby defining the scope for their own centrally-driven initiatives. This approach requires a sufficient degree of consultation and negotiation between the parties to produce a consensus.

Central governments and supportive donor agencies must take account of the constraints in the capacity of lower level actors. Many of the measures taken will have to be implemented by parties that are not under the direct control of central government (e.g. farmers, water users, businesses, civil society groups). Hence the toolkit of measures to carry out the climate resilience agenda needs to include information, stakeholder consultation, and possibly fiscal and financial inducements.

Climate resilience is a recent and cross-cutting issue, and will call for systems and administrative structures that promote integration in both a vertical and horizontal direction (see Figure 1). Vertical integration draws together

roles and responsibilities across central, sectoral, and local levels, as well as having international, regional and transboundary dimensions. Horizontal integration aims at coordination and mediation across sectoral and cross-sectoral interests that will improve resource efficiency and enhance sustainability.

### Reinforcing roles and responsibilities

**Central government** – Central government should lead on effective coordination and ensure that line ministry strategies for climate resilience are aligned with national objectives. It has an important role in maintaining cross-sector dialogue in water management and managing competitive demands in a changing climate. It also needs to link to secure funding from various sources to cover the additional costs of climate resilience. The more that it can embed climate resilience in its existing systems, rather than setting

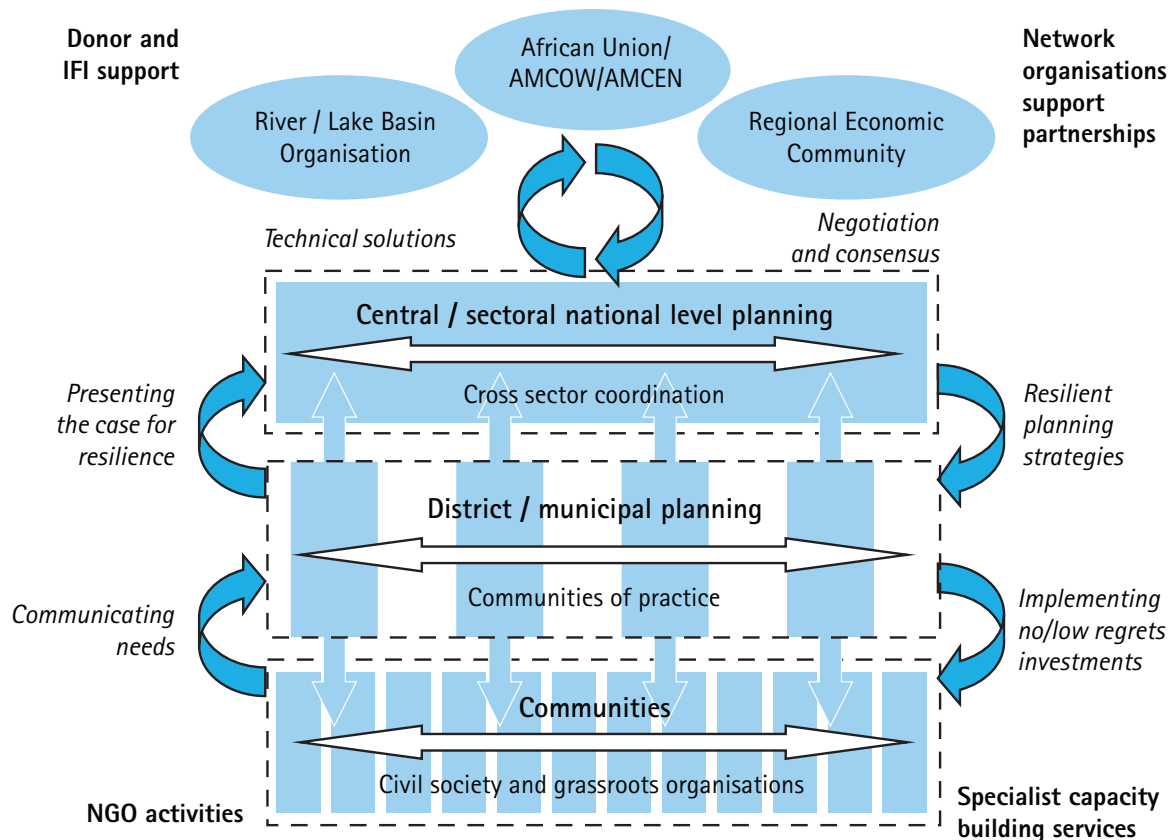


Figure 1. Key relationships for building climate resilience.

up new parallel structures, the better the prospects of successful and sustainable development. Investment will be needed to make institutions adaptive and flexible, an example of the 'soft' measures that will be required alongside 'hard' investment in infrastructure.

**Line ministries** – Line ministries have a responsibility to incorporate climate resilience into their policy and planning processes, and to feed back information on climate impacts to central government. Their sector planners will need to be reinforced by capacity building, for instance the appointment of climate specialists who will commission impact studies and liaise with centres of technical excellence. They should make use of climate screening tools<sup>1</sup> for identifying and addressing climate risks during the practical implementation of such programmes. Their spending departments should review the channels through which their funds are transferred to project implementation to ensure avoidance of delays and under spending.

**Local communities and municipal administrations** – Bottom-up initiatives are needed to balance the top-down approaches described above. The main brunt of climate change impact will be borne at this level. Many local communities, both rural and urban, are already experiencing a foretaste of climate change through greater climatic extremes, growing water stress and other potential symptoms. Local actors will have a different perspective to their central counterparts. Centrally-driven measures, including major hydraulic works, will have a differential impact on communities, with both gainers as well as losers. Hence the climate resilience agenda must involve consultation and negotiation between central and local authorities and other stakeholders to produce full 'ownership' by all concerned (see Box 1).

#### Box 1 Local level perspectives

Local consultation throws light on the more subtle ways in which climate change affects people. It can provide missing knowledge about the likely responses to impacts. Local government and civil society are best placed to understand vulnerability and to ensure that adaptation meets local needs. Capturing community perspectives and indigenous knowledge and integrating this knowledge with additional scientific and technical knowledge will improve higher level strategies for climate change adaptation and resilience.

Central governments and donor agencies supporting local initiatives must take full account of the capacity constraints faced by lower level actors. The toolkit of measures needs to include information, stakeholder consultation, and possibly incentives to promote engagement of local actors and stakeholders.

NGOs, which often work directly in local communities and can bring innovative ways of working, will have a key role in promoting local efforts for climate resilience.

#### Regional Economic Communities (RECs), River and Lake Basin Organisations (RLBOs) and other transboundary bodies

– RECs are economic regional organisations with the convening power to bring key players to the table for negotiation. RECs can be the fora in which national governments reach management agreements for benefit-sharing from transboundary waters. The river basin is a basic administrative unit for many purposes within countries, and is an appropriate level for action between riparian countries. RLBOs can provide technical support for building a benefit-sharing evidence base supporting pooling of resources by African countries. The benefit-sharing philosophy underpins efforts for water security and climate resilience at this level. Some regional and transboundary bodies may set up their own climate resilience and adaptation unit – as the Mekong River Commission has done – but these need to facilitate linkages across other sectors beyond environment. Regional and transboundary bodies need secure sources of finance from their partner governments and international donor agencies in order to continue the type of work that has already yielded vital results (see Box 2).

#### Box 2 Transboundary water management, the SADC example

In Southern Africa, much of the institution building for shared river basin management is undertaken in cooperation with the Southern African Development Community (SADC), in partnership with various donor partners such as USAID, GIZ, SIDA, the EU and others. The SADC Protocol on Shared Water Resources (2000) created a platform for cooperative arrangements between the 15 SADC members for managing transboundary water resources. Since the signing of the Protocol, focus on the establishment of river basin organisations has increased. Also capacity building in governments has increased and created an enabling environment for institutional development of these organisations to effectively manage shared water resources, and contribute to regional cooperation, economic growth and poverty reduction. In 2011, SADC launched *Climate Change Adaptation Strategy in SADC: a Strategy for the Water Sector*. This clearly reinforces the importance of the different intervention levels – regional, basin and local.

<sup>1</sup> Further details can be found in the Technical Background Document.



## Summary of recommendations

- Central government has a natural role in leadership and coordination for climate resilient development, and acting as a driver for change through line ministries and local governments.
- Governments and donors must devote resources to give national institutions the capacity to respond to climate change. It is particularly important to alleviate capacity constraints faced by lower level actors in implementing the climate-resilience agenda, including local governments and community organisations which will bear the brunt of climate change.
- For the majority of African countries, achieving water security “in a harsher climate” will involve transboundary cooperation with their neighbours and regional partners. The RECs and RLBOs that will facilitate this cooperation will need strengthening and better financing to enable them to fulfil their greater responsibilities.
- The engagement of all non-state actors needs to be assured through the provision of information, consultation and appropriate funding. Involving these stakeholders will require full understanding of their different circumstances, constraints and incentives, which will determine the choice of climate-resilient policies.

## Transboundary Basin approach to adaptation essential

Most climate change interventions under the UNFCCC are at the country level or local level. There is need for climate change interventions to adopt a transboundary approach that goes beyond national boundaries, because most river basins are shared. Africa has 53 shared river basins. Adaptation focused at the national level alone will not succeed due to the lack of consideration of downstream implications of interventions. In some instances, cost effective adaptation opportunities may lie at the basin level rather than national level. Cooperation among countries sharing river basins is essential if these countries are to

achieve water security and climate resilient development.

## Supporting implementation from non-state actors

Governments set national strategy and formulate the plans and policies within which climate-resilience is pursued. But implementation rests heavily with society at large, acting in various roles – as individual water users, participants in civil society bodies, private businesses using water consultants, suppliers, researchers, educators and technology developers, and others. The diverse energies and talents of all these parties need to be harnessed.

**Recommended further reading:**  
GWP/AMCOW. 2012. *Water Security and Climate Resilient Development: Strategic Framework*. GWP, Stockholm, Sweden.

GWP/AMCOW. 2012. *Water Security and Climate Resilient Development: Technical Background Document*. GWP, Stockholm, Sweden.



Climate & Development Knowledge Network

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